

and Mr. Somphone's safe return to his family, his disappearance is still unexplained.

A respected member of the development community, Mr. Somphone has lived and worked for many years in Laos and his efforts to strengthen Laotian civil society are well documented. The circumstances of his disappearance are mysterious, and, given his high profile, more than troubling. Furthermore, the lack of effort on the part of the Laotian government to investigate what has been described by many international observers as a forced disappearance is deeply disappointing.

Mr. Somphone's courageous work on behalf of political freedom and the protection of human rights in Laos is admirable, and he and others who engage in such pursuits should not fear for their safety, especially at the hands of a government. Despite repeated offers of international assistance and numerous inquiries about Mr. Somphone's welfare, the Laotian government appears satisfied despite having made no progress on the case.

I call on Laotian authorities to recognize the importance this has for Members of Congress and the American people, and people around the world, and to take all actions necessary to enable Mr. Somphone to return home to his family.

#### TRIBUTE TO RAY ALLEN

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I have spoken many times on the Senate floor about Vermont's dedicated farming families. Today, I would like to recognize the contributions of a great Vermont farmer, at a time of transition, Ray Allen of Allenholm Farm in South Hero, VT.

Ray has, since 1990, represented the University of Vermont as a delegate to the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching, CARET. The APLU is a research, policy, and advocacy organization representing 235 universities and public land grant institutions nationwide, and CARET advocates for greater national support and understanding of the land-grant university system's food and agricultural research, extension, and teaching programs that enhance the quality of life for all people.

Ray is the longest serving delegate nationally to the CARET and has made many significant contributions to the university extension component of the land grant mission. It is fitting, and should surprise no one that this seventh generation Vermont farmer has so truly served the land grant mission, considering that Ray's ancestors began farming in South Hero, VT in 1870, at about the same time that Vermont Senator Justin Morrill gained passage of his legislation creating the Land Grant College system.

Allenholm Farm is the oldest continuously operating apple orchard in the State of Vermont, and over the

years has grown to be a mainstay of our regional and State agricultural economy.

In 1870, Ray Allen's great-grandfather purchased the current farm, marking the beginning of a family farming tradition on lovely Grand Isle, VT. Today, Ray and his wife Pam run the Allenholm Farm with the help of their children, grandchildren, and now great-grandchildren.

The chain of islands running up the center of Lake Champlain was once home to more than 100 commercial apple orchards. Today there are fewer, but the Allen's have thrived through creativity. They have diversified the farm to include many new apple varieties, and they now produce and retail their own cider, ice cider, hard cider, applesauce, and more than 3,000 apple pies every year.

Making great use of their location, which is within sight of New York and a few miles from the Canadian border, Ray and Pam have made the Allenholm Farm an international destination. Visitors can rent bicycles, stay the night at the Bed & Breakfast overlooking the orchards, buy maple syrup and maple creamies, and visit their petting zoo to meet Willie and Sassafrass, the famous kissing donkeys.

The Allenholm Farm AppleFest attracts up to 25,000 visitors annually and has yielded a bountiful harvest for the entire local economy of the Champlain islands.

Vermont's agricultural economy is thriving today as more and more of farmers follow Ray and Pam's formula: Focus on superb quality, create value-added products, build the Vermont brand, provide local food to local markets, and have fun doing it. For many visitors, Ray and Pam Allen are the face of farming.

As Vermont's agricultural leaders are inclined to do, Ray has taken on many leadership roles in his local community, as well at the State and National level, all in addition to his decades of service to the Association of Public Land Grant Universities. He has served as town auditor, justice of the peace, a member of the school board and has been chief of the rescue squad since its inception in 1973. Ray's contributions to his alma mater, the University of Vermont, are too numerous to list completely here, but they include current or past membership on the boards of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, UVM Extension, and the Alumni Council. Ray's feats as a student track star are still the subject of legend now, 50 years later, and two annual track trophies bear his name.

As a strong supporter of the land grant mission, I thank Ray Allen for his service to the Association of Public Land Grant Universities as a delegate to the Council of Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching. I am certain that Ray will be missed in this role but that he will continue to build on this record of accomplishment and

public service in many other venues and that the seventh generation Allenholm Farm will continue to thrive under his leadership.

Marcelle and I think of Ray and Pam as very special friends and cherished Vermonters.

#### RECOGNIZING SUNDY BEST

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize an exceptionally talented country music duo from my home State of Kentucky. Kris Bentley and Nick Jamerson have vaulted their band, Sundy Best, from the small bars and music halls of eastern Kentucky into the national spotlight. The story of their rise is remarkable, and one that is far from its conclusion.

Nick and Kris first met in elementary school in Prestonsburg, KY, where they both grew up in music-loving families. The two started a band together in high school but parted ways when Nick went to play football at Pikeville College and Kris enrolled in Centre College, where he played basketball. Nick's passion for music never subsided, though, and after college he contacted Kris to inquire about purchasing a drum set. As it happened, Kris's passion for music remained as well—he didn't have a set to sell, but he would gladly come play with his old buddy Nick. The two friends picked up right where they left off, and the very next night they were playing their first gig together.

The band's big break came in November of 2010. Nick had just moved to Lexington with Kris, and the two landed a gig at Redmon's, a classic Lexington live music establishment. Previously the two had played just as "Nick and Kris," but for a venue like Redmon's they needed a name that they could promote. The two settled on one that reflected their musical roots in Sunday church services. As Kris tells it, "It was originally going to be Sunday's Best but then we said, 'No, Sundy Best.'" The duo dropped the "a" from Sunday because, "That's the way we talk."

The show at Redmon's was an enormous success, so much so that they began to play a regular gig there. This consistent venue for their music was instrumental in establishing the band's fan base and name recognition. Kris acknowledges that this was when "people started taking us seriously . . . because that's a premier music venue."

Things have been looking up for Sundy Best ever since. In 2013 they released their first album, *Door Without a Screen*, and watched it climb into the iTunes Top 10. The video for the hit song from the album, "Home (I Wanna Go)," helped drive the album's success and is a fixture on Country Music Television.

As a fellow Kentuckian, I am proud of the success seen by Sundy Best. Nick and Kris are not only talented musicians, but they are also outstanding ambassadors for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Although their

music is spreading further across the country each day, their roots remain grounded in eastern Kentucky.

I ask that my Senate colleagues join me in recognizing the success of Sundy Best and wishing them well with the recent release of their new album, *Bring Up the Sun*.

Kentucky Monthly recently published an article chronicling the rise of Sundy Best. I ask unanimous consent that the full article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the RECORD as follows:

[From Kentucky Monthly, Feb. 25, 2014]

#### THE BEST MEN WIN

(By Tricia Despres)

When kids grow up with something to prove, they can become stubborn and a bit hardheaded. But when those kids grow up to be adults who want to make a living as musicians . . . well, they just might become superstars.

So goes the story of Sundy Best.

Blending an eclectic mix of acoustic guitar with the beat of the cajón drum and the compelling vocals of Nick Jamerson and Kris Bentley, Sundy Best looks as if they are about to embark on a career many others are often left to dream about. Just last year, the Kentucky-based duo released a deluxe version of their album *Door Without a Screen* and watched as it landed in the Top 10 on iTunes. The video for their single "Home (I Wanna Go)" reached the top of CMT Pure's fan-voted poll for multiple weeks. A brand-new album in 2014 is sure to help the duo prove to the rest of the world that, sometimes, the underdogs win.

"Growing up, I always seemed to have a chip on my shoulder," says Jamerson. "As a kid who loved playing sports, I was smaller than anyone else, so I always had something to prove in everything that I did. It was the attitude I would ultimately have with everything in my life. I was just always super competitive."

It was an attitude Jamerson seemed to inherit from his close-knit family. "Three of my grandparents had a college degree, which, coming from a small mining town in Kentucky, was not at all common," he recalls. "I mean, my grandmother could build anything. Being around those kinds of people all my life and seeing how driven and successful they were . . . it definitely made an impression on me."

As a 5-foot-10 kid basketball player from Prestonsburg, Bentley also was up against his share of obstacles, none of which he hadn't learned to conquer during his childhood years growing up within the sacred walls of the church, hence the name Sundy Best. "I would play drums every Sunday with my dad and brother," recalls Bentley, describing himself as a good kid who "put Mom through the wringer . . . church really was the only outlet to get out there and do music, especially in eastern Kentucky."

Besides sports and a childhood spent within the church, the two also shared a musical foundation formed within their homes, often spending countless hours listening to a diverse mix of rock, pop, and bluegrass. "Everyone would get together at my grandparents' house and play the old bluegrass standards," recalls Jamerson. "The doctor up the road would come over and play the fiddle, Grandpa played the banjo, Grandma played guitar, and my great-aunt played the mandolin."

First meeting in elementary school, Jamerson and Bentley would go on to form a

firm foundation of friendship through their teenage years, which continues to benefit them to this day. "When you know someone as long as we have, you know each other's dynamics," says Jamerson. "He is like a brother to me. It's gratifying to do this whole music thing alongside someone you have known for so long."

After high school, the pair's goal to play sports often competed with the draw they shared to ultimately pursue a music career. "Music was the one passion that I always had, but looking back, I am glad my parents talked me into getting a college degree," says Jamerson, who was on the Pikeville College football team. "The people I met and the experiences I had in college made me the person I am now. That's where songs come from. You need perspective and life lessons as a writer."

The end of college (Bentley attended and played basketball for Centre) brought the beginning of the duo's quick, yet organic, ascent to musical success. After their joint move to Lexington and a brief stint working at the local cable company, the two began performing at patio parties, restaurants and clubs, often playing four-hour sets each night. A regular gig at Lexington's Redmon's helped the two establish a growing fan base eager to find out more about the band.

"Thank goodness for social media," says Bentley, who cut his musical teeth trying to emulate the songs of artists such as Bob Seger and Tom Petty. "Good ol' Facebook was the only way to connect to our fans and tell them where we were going to be every night. We would always have 20 or 30 people from eastern Kentucky who knew us from when we played sports drive up on a weeknight to see us perform. Seeing that kind of support when we were just out there playing cover songs was a huge boost to our confidence."

Then, Sundy Best recorded the song that would change their career: "Home (I Wanna Go)." "That song took off right around the same time when the winter had set in and the patio gigs had shut down," recalls Bentley. "Once people heard that song, the whole thing just grew. People knew we were serious about doing music."

In 2012, the duo recorded some of their songs that they self-produced with friend and filmmaker Coleman Saunders, and independently released *Door Without a Screen*.

Last year, they were asked to play the jewel of all venues: the Grand Ole Opry. "As a musician and performer, I don't think I will ever be the same," says Jamerson. "I cried when I found out we were playing there. It was like being at church and feeling something on your heart and you don't know what it is. We had been touring all year, so sharing it with our families was an unbelievable feeling. I mean, what else could top that? I was watching Netflix the other night and they were doing a two-day concert special on Neil Young and were showing this concert he did at the Ryman Auditorium, and I mean, he was walking through the same doors we did when we were playing there for the Grand Ole Opry. Every time we get the chance to play there, it ends up being quite the spiritual experience."

The year 2014 brings Sundy Best fans the much-anticipated new album *Bring Up the Sun*, a collection of songs that just might take their longtime fans a bit by surprise. "Our first album was quite Kentucky-centric," says Jamerson, who spends any spare time he has at home in Lexington with his two dogs and cat. "The music just feels good in our bones. It's a really broad album, which everyone we work with has a hard time explaining. But everyone will find something different in it. It's good music, but it's coming from a bit of a different

angle now, so I suppose people are going to be surprised. Some people want every record to sound the same, but once your fans think they know you, you are done. You won't grow as musicians if they think they have you figured out."

"We definitely have a vision of where we want to be," says Bentley, who with Jamerson played more than 190 dates out on the road in 2013. "I would never have expected to be where we are today just one year ago. I think 2014 is going to be another growth year for us. A lot of people still don't know who we are, so we want to definitely continue to play new markets. We are excited to see what happens with this new record and then determine what happens next."

No matter where their musical journey might still yet lead them, one thing is for sure: These two will continue to give credit where credit is due.

"You hear people all the time talking about how they are Texas proud or Georgia proud or even Tennessee proud," says Bentley. "When you are from eastern Kentucky, you are automatically proud. You can be anywhere in the world, and if you meet someone from eastern Kentucky, you are immediately friends. Plus, they are the craziest fans ever. We love Nashville and all, but we would just rather stay right here in Kentucky. The people here have been the biggest driving factor in our career, and we can never be too thankful."

"Before I moved to Lexington, my whole life had been spent living in eastern Kentucky. I had never had a chance to miss living in the country. And as we have begun touring more, I now know it was something I myself took for granted," says Jamerson. "We love Kentucky and will always want to carry that flag . . . but we can't wait to spread the word to everyone else, too."

#### SYRIAN WAR CRIME TRIBUNAL

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, Senators RUBIO, MURPHY, KAINE, and I recently introduced in the Senate a concurrent resolution on the need for the investigation and prosecution of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide committed by any groups involved in civil war in Syria. Congressman CHRIS SMITH has introduced the House version of this concurrent resolution. It calls for President Obama to have our Ambassador to the U.N. use the influence and vote of the United States to promote the establishment of a Syrian war crimes tribunal. The need is stark. Quite simply, the terrible crimes being committed in the civil war in Syria call out for justice. As such, the U.N. should establish a tribunal similar to the ones created in response to the charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in the former Yugoslavia, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda.

As the Syrian conflict entered its fourth year this month, the horrific violence there continues unabated. The losses from the conflict are staggering. According to some estimates the death toll has reached more than 146,000. There are an estimated 6.5 million internally displaced persons in Syria and millions of Syrian refugees have fled their country.

Last week I had the privilege of meeting with a number of dedicated